DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 417 515 EC 306 257

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TITLE	School-Wide Behavioral Management Systems. ERIC/OSEP Digest #E563.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Reston, VA.
SPONS AGENCY	Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-EC-98-1
PUB DATE	1998-02-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	RR93002005
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC/OSEP Special Project, ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589; toll-free telephone: 800-328-0272; fax: 703-620-2521; e-mail: ericec@cec.sped.org; World Wide Web: http://www.cec.sped.org/ericec.htm
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Behavior Change; *Behavior Disorders; *Behavior Problems; Discipline; Elementary Secondary Education; Interpersonal Competence; *Intervention; Program Development; Program Effectiveness; School Role; *Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS	*Behavior Management; ERIC Digests; School Based Services

ABSTRACT

This digest reviews and summarizes what is known about effective school-wide behavioral management systems. Emphasis in such systems is on consistency throughout the building and across classrooms with the entire staff, both professional and nonprofessional, uniformly implementing common strategies. Common features of school-wide behavioral management systems are highlighted, including: (1) total staff commitment to managing behavior, whatever approach is taken; (2) clearly defined and communicated expectations and rules; (3) consequences and clearly stated procedures for correcting rule-breaking behaviors; (4) an instructional component for teaching students self-control and/or social skill strategies; and (5) a support plan to address the needs of students with chronic, challenging behaviors. Systems reviewed include Effective Behavioral Support, a school-wide process and individualized instruction designed to prevent and decrease problem behavior; expansion of placement options for students with behavioral and/or emotional disturbances; and Unified Discipline, a system which emphasizes unified attitudes, expectations, consequences, and team roles. A sample school-wide code of conduct is provided. (Contains 10 references.) (DB)

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ERIC/OSEP Digest

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School-Wide Behavioral Management Systems

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From an Article by Warger, Eavy and Associates

For over a quarter of a century, the number one concern facing America's public schools has been discipline. What educators are finding, however, is that the root of the problem goes beyond rule-breaking. Many of today's students need more than just sound and consistent discipline policies — they also need positive behavioral instruction.

Consequently, educators have been seeking new ways to move beyond traditional "punishment" and provide opportunities for all children to learn self-discipline. Simultaneously, researchers have begun to study and advocate for broader, proactive, positive school-wide discipline systems that include behavioral support. One promising avenue for achieving the dual goals of teaching self-discipline and managing behavior is school-wide behavior management.

While there are different variations of school-wide systems of behavioral support, most have certain features in common (see box below). The emphasis is on consistency — both throughout the building and across classrooms. The entire school staff (including cafeteria workers and bus drivers) is expected to adopt strategies that will be uniformly implemented. As a result, these approaches necessitate professional development and long-term commitment by the school leadership for this innovation to take hold. A few examples of promising behavioral management systems follow.

Effective Behavioral Support

Effective Behavioral Support (EBS) refers to a system of school-wide processes and individualized instruction designed to prevent and decrease problem behavior and to maintain appropriate behavior. It is not a model with a prescribed set of practices. Rather, it is a team-based process designed to address the unique needs of individual schools. Teams are provided with empirically validated practices and, through the EBS process, arrive at a school-wide plan. Steps in the process include:

1. Clarify the need for effective behavioral support and establish commitment, including administrative support and participation. Priority for this should be reflected in the school improvement plan.
2. Develop a team focus with shared ownership.
3. Select practices that have a sound research base. Create a comprehensive system that prevents as well as responds to problem behavior. Tie effective behavioral support activities to the school mission.
4. Develop an action plan establishing staff responsibilities.
5. Monitor behavioral support activities. Continue successful procedures; change or abandon ineffective procedures.

According to researcher Tim Lewis of the University of Missouri, several factors foster EBS success:

- Faculty and staff must agree that school-wide behavioral management is one of their top priorities and will probably require 3 to 5 years for completion.
- Teams must start with a "doable" objective that meets their needs and provides some initial success.
- Administrators must support the process by respecting team decisions, providing time for teams to meet, securing ongoing staff training, and encouraging all staff to participate.

Common Features of School-Wide Behavioral Management Systems

- Total staff commitment to managing behavior, whatever approach is taken.
- Clearly defined and communicated expectations and rules.
- Consequences and clearly stated procedures for correcting rule-breaking behaviors.
- An instructional component for teaching students self-control and/or social skill strategies.
- A support plan to address the needs of students with chronic, challenging behaviors.

Expanding Placement Options

As part of an OSEP research project designed to support systems change strategies for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, researcher Doug Cheney of the University of Washington and his colleagues are studying school-wide management plans that (a) teach and support prosocial behavior and (b) identify consistent school-wide responses to challenging behaviors.

Initial findings are encouraging: The implementation of school-wide structures appears to add to the presently existing continuum of services, which increases the school's ability to expand placement options for students with severe emotional disturbance.

One school in the process of implementing this model began by developing a unified code of conduct (see box). When a child does not follow the code, teachers use a standard set of school-wide disciplinary procedures. When the behavior escalates above typical, low-level classroom violations, the procedures include a social cognitive problem-solving component.

Unified Discipline

As part of an OSEP-funded primary prevention project, Bob Algozzine and Richard White, at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte, are studying a school-wide approach to behavioral management called Unified Discipline.

Four objectives drive the efforts to implement this system:

- *Unified attitudes:* Teachers and school personnel believe that instruction can improve behavior, behavioral instruction is part of teaching, personalizing misbehavior makes matters worse, and emotional poise underlies discipline methods that work.
- *Unified expectations:* Consistent and fair expectations for behavioral instruction are a key to successful discipline plans.
- *Unified consequences:* Using a warm yet firm voice, teachers state the behavior, the violated rule, and the unified consequence and offer encouragement.
- *Unified team roles:* Clear responsibilities are described for all school personnel.

Preliminary data on Unified Discipline show promising trends such as reductions in office referrals.

School-Wide Code of Conduct

- **Safety:** Are my actions safe for myself and for others?
- **Respect:** Do my actions show respect for myself and for others?
- **Honesty:** Do my words and actions represent truth?
- **Responsibility:** Do my actions meet the expectation to take care of myself and be a dependable member of the community?
- **Courtesy:** Do my actions help make this a nice place, where people feel welcome and accepted, and where they can do their work without disruptions?

Developed by Fuller Elementary School, North Conway NH

Is a School-Wide System Right for You?

Clearly, from a preventive standpoint, researchers would agree that all schools can benefit from having in place a clearly defined, consistently enforced behavioral management system that is designed to support students in controlling their own behaviors.

In cases where school staff have significant concerns about discipline, a school-wide system may be a welcome solution. For a fuller look at the research discussed in this digest, the reader is referred to *Research Connections*, Fall 1997, published by the ERIC/OSEP Special Project (see front for contact information).

Resources

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RR93002005. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OSEP or the Department of Education.

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